

REPENTANCE IS A WAY OF LOVE

Jeremiah 26:8-15

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⁸ *But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, "You must die!"⁹ Why do you prophesy in the LORD's name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.¹⁰ When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the LORD and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD's house.¹¹ Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, "This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!"¹² Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard.¹³ Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.¹⁴ As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right.¹⁵ Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."*

Dear friends in Christ,

I had the distinctly distasteful responsibility of going to a young woman and showing her, from scripture, that it was not only improper, but sinful for her to be living with a young man, outside of marriage. It was quite an eye-opening experience for me, not because of this particular sin, but because the young man, who was not a Christian, had some particularly strange ideas about repentance.

He seemed to think that repentance was doing nothing more but coming to church and saying you're sorry. I explained to him that part of repentance is certainly saying you're sorry, but it isn't just one single act. It is also "amending your sinful life."

I guess, I shouldn't be surprised that someone who claims to be an unbeliever and an enemy of Christ, should misunderstand this, but I have found that Christians also misunderstand about repentance. Since we are in the season of Lent, a time of repentance, it is fitting that today's lesson teaches us that **REPENTANCE IS A WAY OF LOVE**.

1

(8-9) *"But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, "You must die! Why do you prophesy in the LORD'S name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD."* Jeremiah came to the people of Jerusalem and told them they needed to repent. This shows us that repentance is a way we love God's Word

The people at Jeremiah's time had not loved God very well. In fact, they were guilty, from the king on down, of not following the commands of God. They didn't want to hear God's word, nor did they want to obey it. They were a sinful people.

So the Lord sent his prophet, Jeremiah, to them. He told them very simply that unless they repented, their city and their temple would be like Shiloh. Shiloh was the place where the ark of the covenant had been kept before there was a temple in Jerusalem. When it was captured by the Philistines, Shiloh was destroyed. During David's time the ark was recaptured and brought to Jerusalem and put into the new temple during Solomon's reign. But at the time of Jeremiah, Shiloh, the place where the ark had been was a complete ruin. Jeremiah was telling them that Jerusalem, the place where the ark was in their time, would be just like Shiloh, unless they repented.

Their reaction was immediate. They didn't want to hear this message. So they crowded around Jeremiah in an unfriendly way. You see, they were not only going to mistreat God's messenger, they were also mistreating God's message. In other words, they were not being repentant because of the way they were loving God.

This should not be so surprising to us, when we consider the gospel lesson for today. Because that is exactly the reception that Jesus got. Their lack of repentance was so great, that it led Jesus to weep over the people of Jerusalem and say, (Luke 13) *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate."*

It was true in Jeremiah's time; it was true in Jesus' time; what about our time? That young man I already talked about made another point. He pointed out to me, the number of people he saw who would go out and get drunk or commit sexual sins or some other sin, on Saturday night, then come and repent of them on Sunday, only to do the same thing all over again on Monday. I'm sure a certain amount of that was the exaggeration of an unbeliever. But there's a grain of truth there, isn't there? And think about it, if those around us can see the sin in our lives so readily, if we are such bad examples of living a Christian life, then what must God see, who knows all of our secret faults too?

And when we tear down someone's reputation, or simply ignore a word of rebuke or get angry at someone who has lovingly brought God's word to us, haven't we done the same thing as the people of Jerusalem? That's ignoring not only God's message, but also God's messenger.

2

But more than that. (12-15) *"Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."*

Jeremiah very plainly told them. The Lord will not hold guiltless, those who mistreat his message and his messengers. God will destroy those who mistreat him. And he kept his word with Jerusalem not only in Jeremiah's time, but also in Jesus' time. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians. It was destroyed again in 70 A.D. by the Romans. God punishes those who do not repent.

But Jeremiah also told the people that if they did truly repent, the Lord would relent and not destroy them. A good example of that is the city of Nineveh. God sent Jonah to those people to tell them that they and their city were going to be destroyed unless they repented of their sinful ways. But they did repent, not just with their lips, but also with their hearts and lives. So God relented and spared Nineveh.

As you and I go through these forty days of Lent, do you see what I see when I look at the cross? Do you see the crown of thorns, the nails, the spear wounds, and the scourge marks on his back? Do you look at them and say to yourself, "I caused that. That happened because of me and my sins."

If you do, in the same breath, I want you to know that your Savior says to you, "I have done all of this for you so that your sins are satisfied. They have been paid for. This is how much I love you."

Then each morning when I awake and I take a spiritual inventory of my previous day and see all the times I have sinned and I see what a spiritual failure I have been, I remember Christ's love and the assurance he has given me that this day is also a new day in his kingdom. And I am urged and encouraged by the depth of God's love to turn away from sin and live more and more for him.

You are loved. Your Lord loves you this much! Now go and live for him. Repentance is a way of life. Repentance is a way of love. Amen.